

Puget Sound's Health 2002 Fact Sheet

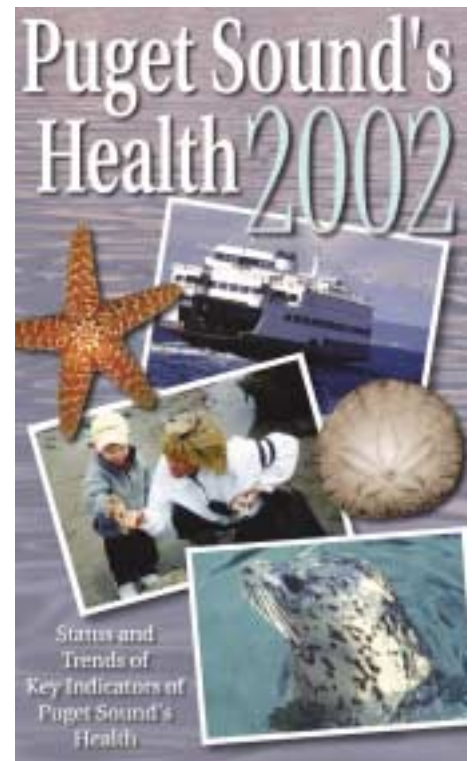
What is the Puget Sound's Health report?

This is the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team's (Action Team) third report on key indicators or measures of the health of Puget Sound. The report includes information on 19 indicators that can be tracked through time to assess the successes and shortcomings of efforts to protect and restore Puget Sound.

The Action Team selected these indicators so that diverse aspects of Puget Sound are represented. These include water quality in rivers and shellfish growing areas, populations of marine fish, birds and mammals, contaminants in sediments and health effects on English sole as well as other measures.

What is the overall status of Puget Sound?

The picture that emerges from this set of 19 indicators is that some aspects of Puget Sound's health are improving, but in many cases long-term problems require persistent restoration efforts. Some problems, such as toxic contaminants in sediments and the food web and improving salmon habitat by replacing culverts, will take years to correct. Of greatest concern are the drastic declines in a range of species that include fish, marine birds and marine mammals. Individually, most of these do not warrant protection under the federal Endangered Species Act, but the severe population decreases in some of these animals, suggests an ecosystem-wide problem that is not fully understood.



Why was the Health report published?

State law directs the Action Team to report on the health of water and marine life in Puget Sound. This information is needed by decision makers to help guide protection and restoration efforts. *Puget Sound's Health 2002* also gives information directly to the citizens of the region about the status and trends of the Puget Sound environment and specific actions citizens can do to help protect Puget Sound.

Summary of Indicator Results

In general, of the 19 indicators, 8 measurements show Puget Sound's health is getting better; two measurements show the Sound's health is getting worse; three are mixed; four are persistent toxic contamination problems; and two are new indicators.

Indicators showing some degree of improvement during the past two years:

- Area of commercial shellfish beds approved for direct harvest
- Health classification of beaches used by recreational shellfish harvesters
- River and stream water quality for recreation, measuring bacteria
- Size and frequency of major oil spills
- Acreage of spartina infestation, an aquatic nuisance species
- Freshwater habitat available to salmon (culverts allowing fish migration)
- Water temperature at river and stream monitoring stations
- Marine survival of Puget Sound wild coho salmon

Indicators that reflect declining conditions:

- Scoters populations
- Rockfish populations

Indicators that are mixed or do not reflect conditions that are clearly improving or declining:

- Harbor seals populations
- Herring populations
- Marine water quality

Indicators reflecting persistent toxic contamination:

- Area of contaminated sediments (bottom of waterways) Contamination in mussels
- Contamination in harbor seals
- Occurrence of liver disease in English sole

New indicators in the 2002 report:

- Abundance and distribution of eelgrass beds
- Modifications to marine shorelines

Sources and contributors

The report contains results from a number of sources, including several Washington state agencies, one federal agency and a Canadian government agency.

Specific contributors include:

- Washington departments of Agriculture, Ecology, Fish and Wildlife, Health and Natural Resources
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Transboundary Georgia Basin - Puget Sound Environmental Indicators Working Group (Canadian and American government agencies)

For more information regarding the *Puget Sound's Health 2002* report, please contact Pete Dowty at (360) 407-7561 or email at pdowty@psat.wa.gov.

For more information about the Action Team visit our website at www.wa.gov/puget_sound or call the Action Team at (360) 407-7300 or 1 (800) 54-SOUND.

If you need these materials in an alternative format, call our TDD number 1-800-833-6388.